

Nantucket Basic Facts

Created around 12,000 – 10,000 years ago by retreating glaciers.

Geographic Location:

Longitude - 70 degrees West

Latitude - 41 degrees North

Island's dimensions:

14 miles (20 Km) long,

3 - 5 miles (2-3 Km) wide on average

Total land is 47.8 square miles (123.8 Km)

The island is located 30 miles (48.3 Km) from Hyannis on Cape Cod.

Because of its location surrounded by water and close proximity to the Gulf Stream Nantucket is 10 degrees warmer than the mainland in winter and 10 degrees cooler in summer.

Nantucket has its own source of fresh drinking water created by the glacier 12,000-10,000 years ago. Water is drawn from an aquifer that sits below the island. Ground water filters down through sand and clay. The clay prevents sea water from invading the "lens." But most importantly, Nantucket does not add chlorine or any other additives to the water supply.

Since 1996, electrical power to the island has been supplied by a 35 megawatt cable from the mainland. In 2006, a 2nd 35 MW cable began operating. Both cables originate from Harwich on Cape Cod and make landfall near Cliffside. Prior to 1996, Nantucket had its own power station located behind the Grand Union (A&P) on Candle Street.

Nantucket's year-round population is 10,000-12,000 (approx.)
Nantucket's summer population is 50,000 – 60,000 (approx.) This does not include short-term stays of one week or less.

Nantucket has public school system (Kindergarten to High School).

Nantucket has had a hospital since 1911.

There are over 800 buildings and structures built before the Civil War (1861) that are still in existence.

Brant Point lighthouse, situated at the entrance to Nantucket harbor is the second oldest established lighthouse in North America. The first was Boston Harbor light in 1716. The first Brant Point light was built in 1746. The current structure, built in 1901 is the ninth lighthouse.

Sankaty Head lighthouse on the eastern shore was built in 1850. The light can be seen 26 miles away. The lighthouse was recently moved 400 feet northeast away from the eroding bluff.

Great Point Light at the tip of the northeast end of the island was established in 1784. The current structure was built in 1986 replacing the structure built in 1818 and destroyed in a 1984 storm.

History

Discovered in 1602 by Englishman Bartholomew Gosnold. Gosnold would later help colonize Jamestown, Virginia.

Settled in 1659 by a small group of Englishmen wishing to escape religious persecution in Salisbury, Massachusetts.

At the time of English arrival, there were approximately 3,000 native people on the island. These natives were affiliated with the Wampanoag tribes found around Cape Cod and the islands. The language was Algonquin.

The name "Nantucket" is a Native American word meaning "Faraway land".

By 1855, the native population had completely died off mostly due to European disease. The last native was Abram Quarry. His portrait is on display in the library.

The early English settlers established the town of Sherburne. Sherburne was originally located at Capuam pond on the north shore. Eventually the town was relocated to its present spot on the west side of the "great harbor".

In 1667 Abiah Folger was born. She would later marry Joseph Franklin. Their youngest child Benjamin was born in Boston in 1709.

In 1692, Nantucket was transferred from the New York Colony to Massachusetts Bay Colony.

In 1795, the town name of Sherburne was changed to Nantucket, thus making the island the only place in North America to have the same name for town, county and island.

In the late 1600's whales prized for their oil were hunted off shore. By the mid 1700s ships set out for longer distances in pursuit of the sperm whale which had the best oil. Spermacetti oil could be used to light lamps. The Pacific Ocean became the main hunting ground and thus made Nantucket the Whaling Capital of the World from 1800 to 1840. By the 1840s, the whaling era for Nantucket was over as the build up of a sand bar outside the harbor prevented bigger ships from landing with their prized oil. The discovery of black oil in Pennsylvania in the 1830s and the ability to ship it cheaper doomed the whaling industry on Nantucket. The final nail in the coffin was the Great Fire of 1846 which burned the wharves and the commercial center of the Town.

On a whaling voyage in 1819, the ship *Essex* was rammed by a whale in the Pacific Ocean off of South America. The ship sank, but most of the crew survived. Author Herman Melville while visiting Nantucket in the 1840s heard the story from 1st Mate Owen Chase which inspired him to write "Moby Dick." Cabin Boy Thomas Nickerson also wrote about the ramming.

In 2000, historian Nat Philbrick wrote the bestseller "In the Heart of the Sea." The houses of 3 major players are still in existence.

[Captain Pollard](#) – Seven Seas Gift Shop – Center and Quince Streets

[Owen Chase](#) – 74 Orange Street

[Thomas Nickerson](#) - Springfield House – end of N. Water Street

In 1837, the first cobblestones were laid out on Lower Main Street, then called State Street. The stones had been brought from Gloucester, MA where they had been stockpiled after serving as ships' ballast. The cobblestones enabled heavy, whale oil laden carts to move up from the wharves without sinking into the mud. Eventually, other streets in Town were paved with cobblestones.

The first public building rebuilt after the fire was the Atheneum (library) in 1847.

In 1847, Maria Mitchell discovered a comet while looking thru a telescope on the roof of the Pacific Bank. Mitchell would later become the first female professor at Vassar College.

Macy's department store in New York City's Herald Square was founded by Rowland Hussey Macy (1822 - 1877). Macy lived on Nantucket and

operated a dry goods store at the corner of Main and Fair Street. In 1858, he moved to New York and opened a store.

In the late 19th century, tourism began to establish of foothold as actors from the New York theatres chose to take their summer vacations here.

Tourism flourished with the establishment of the Nantucket Railroad in 1881. The railroad ran from Steamboat Wharf southward to Surfside and in later years out to Sconset on the eastern shore. By 1917-18, the railroad went bankrupt.

In 1918, cars were finally allowed on the island.

During World War II, the U.S. Navy built a training field for its aircraft on south side of the island. In 1946, the Navy turned the airfield over to the Town and Nantucket Memorial Airport was established. In July and August, the Nantucket Airport is the 2nd busiest airport in New England. Boston Logan is the busiest.

On the night of July 25, 1956, in heavy fog roughly 50 miles south of Nantucket, the Italian ocean liner SS *Andrea Doria*, inbound to New York, was rammed by the SS *Stockholm* bound for Europe. Survivors including the Gifford family of Nantucket were put on rescue ships and some were flown to Nantucket before moving on to hospitals in Boston. The Doria sank the following morning and now rests 250 feet below the surface.

Starting in 1962, Sherburne Associates led by S&H Green Stamps heir Walter Beinecke bought the dilapidated wharves and many downtown buildings. By the late 1960's the wharves were overhauled and the buildings transformed into tourist oriented businesses.

The island was designated a National Historic District in 1966.

Web links to other facts that we might have missed...

Egan Maritime Foundation: www.eganmaritime.org

Lightship Basket Museum: www.nantucketlightshipbasketmuseum.org

Maria Mitchell Association: www.mmo.org

Nantucket Airport: www.nantucketairport.com

Nantucket Cottage Hospital: www.nantucketcottagehospital.org

Nantucket Historical Association: www.nha.org

Nantucket Preservation Foundation: www.nantucketpreservation.org